



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

www.iowanaturestore.com

Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

Aug. 8, 2006

1. August Roadside Pheasant Routes Underway – by Joe Wilkinson [**hold until 8-10**]
2. Dewey's Pasture Bird Conservation Area Dedication
3. Melt Some Metal, Help Create Garbage Sculpture at State Fair
4. DNR to Hold Firearms Auction on August 26
5. Natural Resources Volunteers Finish Summer Strong

[Hold this story until Aug. 10]

AUGUST ROADSIDE PHEASANT ROUTES UNDERWAY

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

From 100 yards away, our targets were in sight. Three little heads and a big one poked out of the roadside grass. We crept to a stop and got out for a closer look. One after another, the pheasant chicks—four of them now--and a hen launched into short flights from the ditch back into the cornfield.

Robin-sized, the little balls of feathers were flapping their wings for one of the first times. “They were probably two weeks old,” guessed Department of Natural Resources wildlife technician Dennis Proctor. “The mother’s early nest was probably hit by predators and she came back and brought off (this) late brood.”

They became hash marks on the tally sheet as we approached the end of his 30-mile survey route in Cedar County. Another startled hen flew low through the ditch, but she was a few hundred feet past the end point. She wouldn’t count. The rest of them did, though, making it a pretty good day. “We had 27 birds today. It was a good route, compared to what we normally see,” pronounced Proctor. The five-year average here is less than 20. In fact, two years ago, we saw none.

Across Iowa each August, wildlife workers and conservation officers drive about 215 routes. The recipe is the same; start at dawn; with calm, clear skies and heavy dew over 30 miles of gravel. Pheasants and other birds come out to the dusty roads to dry off before setting about the process of surviving one more day. Creeping along at 15 miles an

hour, surveyors note how many birds they see - roosters, hens and young of the year. The size of the birds is noted to help determine their age. Also important is the number of birds in a brood. It all gets plugged into the pheasant forecast formula used by DNR upland bird biologist Todd Bogenschutz to estimate bird numbers—and subsequently—hunter success this fall and winter.

Heading into the August surveys, Bogenschutz was cautiously optimistic. Following a 19 percent upturn in pheasant numbers *last* summer, a mild winter meant increased hen survival. A fairly dry spring meant better nesting conditions. Over the next month, results will be plugged into statewide and regional outlooks. Sightings of quail, partridge and rabbits along the routes are also compiled.

A lot of those counts were run a few days late this summer; delayed by the extreme heat through late July and early August. With soil moisture important, Bogenschutz noted that areas in western and northern Iowa have been quite dry through these hot months. Optimal conditions exist when the early morning temperatures meet the dew point. That just wasn't happening, when it was 80 degrees at sunup. Proctor and I finally got out late last week. An overnight shower had moved out of the area, so the 'heavy dew' part was right on the money. Partly cloudy skies and a slight breeze were tolerable.

And the critters did their part. One of five rabbits we would count showed up almost immediately. We saw a dew-soaked rooster slink back into the ditch within the first mile. After three minutes, we were already ahead of that 'O-fer' route in 2004. In the second five miles, the first brood appeared. Wading into the shoulder high grass after them, I was peppered by hundreds of tiny green grasshoppers. We had also interrupted breakfast for Mother Hen and her nearly grown chicks. A couple more roosters, three more broods and a lone hen or two graced us with their presence.

As the 'extra' birds appeared, one more factor became obvious. There was actually *habitat*. This route, west, north and northeast of Tipton, is usually all corn and soybeans, with the scant hayfields and waterways mowed to near-golf course uniformity. Not this year. "Very few ditches and waterways were mowed. It might be because of the high fuel prices, maybe landowners aren't mowing as much," offered Proctor. "Usually they mow them on this route."

A silver lining, perhaps, in the dark cloud of high oil prices? Whatever the reason, each time we saw pheasants, they were in or alongside tall grass and weeds; the stuff they need year-round for protection from predators and the weather. And while this east central Iowa route doesn't compare with traditionally high central and northern routes; for one day, on one route, the view from the windshield was pretty good, with pheasant season less than three months away.

Sidebar: Hunter Safety Clinic

With fall approaching, hunter safety courses are beginning to appear on the calendar. The course is mandatory for some one 16 or over who wishes to buy a hunting license in Iowa. However, it can be helpful in other scenarios, too.

“With a firearm present in about half of all American households, it is important for all young people to be familiar with firearm safety whether or not they plan to hunt,” stresses hunter safety educator Jeff McDowell. “Curiosity has a strong hold on our youth and those that have never seen a gun or talked about safe gun handling are more likely to be curious enough to pick-up a gun they find or are shown by a friend.” McDowell says hunter education courses give people the opportunity to learn about firearms and the safe handling of them, should they ever be encountered. Parents are invited to attend, as well.

For hunter education locations and dates, go to www.iowadnr.com and click on safety education (upper right) to select the county and month you wish to view.

###

DEWEY’S PASTURE BIRD CONSERVATION AREA DEDICATION

RUTHVEN - A ceremony to dedicate the Dewey’s Pasture Wetland Complex as Iowa’s newest Bird Conservation Area (BCA) will take place at 1:30 p.m., August 23. The event will be held at the Lost Island Prairie Wetland Nature Center, which is located in the Lost Island-Huston County Park, about three miles north of Ruthven.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is hosting the dedication that will include brief presentations and the unveiling of a special Bird Conservation Area sign. Following the ceremony, there will be a short driving tour of the area.

Dewey’s Pasture already is recognized as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service, and it is part of Iowa’s largest and probably most important remaining wetland complex, said Bruce Ehresman, DNR wildlife diversity program biologist.

“Designating Dewey’s Pasture as a Bird Conservation Area will add to its national recognition by indicating its importance for nesting and migratory grassland and wetland birds,” Ehresman said. “This area provides important nesting habitat for declining grassland birds, such as Northern Harrier, Bobolink, and Sedge Wren; for declining wetland species like American Bittern, King Rail, and Black Tern, plus it provides nesting and migration stopover habitat for many other bird species suffering nationwide declines.”

“Creating Bird Conservation Areas in Iowa is a priority for DNR’s wildlife diversity program and is part of a larger international effort promoting assistance for all birds with the greatest conservation need,” said Doug Harr, coordinator of the program.

“The BCA program encourages habitat conservation at a large landscape level in order to re-establish stable or growing bird populations.”

“The designation of the Dewey’s Pasture Bird Conservation Area serves as recognition of the excellent teamwork of many partners, cooperating to emphasize the importance of habitat for all birds. State, federal, and county agencies, working together with private conservation organizations and citizens have made this possible,” said Bryan Hellyer, DNR wildlife biologist and acting Ruthven Wildlife Unit manager.

Bird watching and wildlife watching, in general, is a \$188 million industry in Iowa. It is hoped that this new BCA will attract bird watchers from throughout the region. This increased activity by birders should promote growth of the local tourism economy and encourage investment in local bird conservation.

The public is welcome to attend this event. Bird conservationists and wetland appreciators alike are asked to help celebrate the dedication of this very important Bird Conservation Area.

For more information, contact Ehresman at (515) 432-2823 or Harr at (515) 281-4815.

###

MELT SOME METAL, HELP CREATE GARBAGE SCULPTURE AT STATE FAIR

DES MOINES — It’s not every day you get to turn metal into liquid. Take advantage of the opportunity, and join the construction of a metal trash sculpture at the Iowa State Fair.

During both weekends of the fair, volunteers and fairgoers will help turn car parts, ladders, fence posts, rebar and other trash into a sculpture. Ogden artist David Williamson will guide volunteers as they melt, hammer, mold and shape scrap metal using a homemade forge.

The metal comes from a volunteer river cleanup called Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition). This June 17 through 24, volunteers removed roughly 24 tons of garbage from the Iowa and English rivers, including an estimated 12 tons of scrap metal.

Sculpture work will take place at the “Orange Cone Arena” near the Iowa Department of Natural Resources’ (DNR) State Fair building. Join the effort between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Aug. 11, 12, 13, 18 and 19. Times may vary. Participants can also

help create a collaborative poem by sharing their thoughts about rivers and natural resources.

Project AWARE and *Riverse*, the name for the volunteer-driven artwork, are organized by the DNR and intended to involve everyday citizens in natural resources stewardship. This year marks the third time Williamson has worked with Project AWARE. Sculptures created in previous years will be on display at the DNR's fair building.

Project AWARE began in 2002 on the Maquoketa River and has invited volunteers to canoe a different Iowa river each June. Participants join for as little as a day or as long as the entire week, paddling the river, removing trash and learning about natural resources. *Riverse* aims to honor the work of AWARE volunteers while calling attention to water quality issues.

For more information, contact Brandon Harland at (515) 281-3150 or at Brandon.Harland@dnr.state.ia.us.

###

DNR TO HOLD FIREARMS AUCTION ON AUGUST 26

DES MOINES – The Iowa DNR will host a firearms auction on August 26, at the Tourism Building on the Iowa State Fairgrounds. The gates open at 8 a.m. and the auction will begin around 9 a.m. There is no public viewing before this sale.

The firearms are sold “as is” with no guarantee or warranty. Any person interested in purchasing a firearm at the auction must have either a valid Iowa permit to acquire pistols or revolvers, a federal firearms license, or a professional or non-professional permit to carry concealed weapons. The Iowa permit to acquire can be obtained from a sheriff's office. Allow two to three weeks to receive the permit.

There is a 10 percent buyer's premium that will be added to all sales. The premium is the fee paid for the auctioneer. For example, if the winning bid is \$20, the buyer will pay a 10 percent premium, or \$2, added to the bid after taxes, so the payment would be \$20, plus 6 percent sales tax, \$1.20, plus the premium fee, \$2, or \$23.20.

Payment must be made on auction day. All sales are final. Firearms must be removed from the site within one half hour after the sale of the firearm is completed. Sales taxes will be collected.

The Iowa DNR reserves the right to reject any bids and withdraw any item from the sale at any time.

###

NATURAL RESOURCES VOLUNTEERS FINISH SUMMER STRONG

DES MOINES – Iowans have plenty of choices for natural resources volunteerism before summer ends. Keepers of the Land, the volunteer program within the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), encourages all Iowans to join these exciting August opportunities:

- **Butterfly Garden Maintenance:** Help provide habitat for one of nature's most beautiful creatures — the butterfly. The Springbrook Conservation Education Center requests volunteers to help maintain and clean the butterfly garden. Work will also involve invasive species removal. Contact David Messinger at (641) 747-8383, ext. 16 or at David.Messinger@dnr.state.ia.us.
- **Office Assistance:** You can still help the great outdoors without venturing out into the heat. Help the DNR's central office sort and file registrations for boats, snowmobiles and ATVs. Volunteer must be 18 or older. Contact Marj Robbins at (515) 281-6579 or at Marj.Robbins@dnr.state.ia.us.
- **Park Beautification:** Help give two central Iowa parks a facelift. A few extra hands are needed to remove litter at Badger Creek State Recreation Area and along roadsides at Walnut Woods State Park. This is a great project for groups. Wear gloves, long pants and closed-toe shoes. Trash bags will be provided. Contact Tim Gedler at (515) 285-4502 or at Tim.Gedler@dnr.state.ia.us.
- **Public Assistance:** Help introduce visitors to a beautiful piece of architecture at the Frank Lloyd Wright "Walter House" in Cedar Rock State Park. A volunteer "visitor center greeter" will welcome guests to the house and help register people for tours. Volunteer must be 18 or older. Busiest times occur during afternoons, weekends and holidays. Contact Pat Schmitz at (319) 934-3572 or at Pat.Schmitz@dnr.state.ia.us.

Find more information, including an events calendar, at www.keepersoftheland.org.

For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us.

###